LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1203
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Seven Infidel U. S. Presidents

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	The Infidel Fathers	5
II.	George Washington a Deist	16
III.	John Adams the Skeptic	29
IV.	Thomas Jefferson the Materialist	37
V.	Thomas Madison and James Monroe	49
VI.	President Grant	53
VII.	The Religion of Abraham Lincoln	55

SEVEN INFIDEL U. S. PRESIDENTS

CHAPTER I.

THE INFIDEL FATHERS

In another Little Blue Book, *Religion and the French Revolution*, (Little Blue Book No. 1145), I showed how foolish it is for any American to join in the attack on the philosophers who preceded and inspired that momentous liberation. We saw that the grandest principles of the Revolution were, indeed, borrowed from the great French Rationalists of the eighteenth century, but that, when you seek the reason why those humane ideals were bespattered with blood and discredited in the eyes of the world, you must turn to the Church which, after a thousand years of wealth and power, had left the people under the burden of monstrous injustices and so imperfect in character that a bloody revenge was inevitable.

To connect these horrors of the Revolution with the ideals of Voltaire and Rousseau, Diderot and D'Alembert, Holbach and Helvetius, is now in any land an indication of either insincerity or ignorance. In America it is grotesque. For these same ideals inspired most of the men who drafted the more enlightened parts of the American Constitution; and the American Revolution was itself, on the admission of all historians, one of the most direct and most

influential agencies in provoking the French Revolution.

We have heard much about the Puritan Fathers, but little about the Infidel Fathers, who wrought an immeasurably greater thing. No Fourth-of-July orator ventures to refer to the purely humanitarian character of the ideals which from the first set a distinctive mark on the American civilization. The clergy would frown: the time-serving politicians would sympathetically shake their heads. No teacher dare tell how the men who framed the Constitution found their inspiration—not in the Bible or the Church, but in a creed which ignored both. Popular preachers, even influential writers, brush disdainfully aside what they call the "canting speculations" which impute skepticism to the revolutionary leaders and statesmen. Yet I speak a more sober language than Americans of some distinction have used when I say that at least one half of those who did most for the new civilization and its high ideals were Deists and even within the narrow limits of this little book I will prove this by irrefragable evidence.

America now enters the epic of religious evolution, the drama of the rise and fall of civilization, and it at once distinguishes itself by striking the notes of the new era; the secularization of life, religious liberty, education, the plain man's mastery of the plain man's affairs. How came it that a scattered colonial population, removed by a month's hazardous journey from intercourse with other civilizations, found in itself, when the occasion arose, a body of

men imbued with the most advanced sentiments of the time and able to impose them upon a nation?

Let us make allowance for every native circumstance. The new America was largely peopled by bodies of men—Puritans, Catholics, Quakers—who had fled from tyranny to seek a land of liberty; though history will never forget the tyrannies they in their turn set up. The men who would in those days venture over three thousand miles of ocean and create a new world for themselves and their families were men of vigorous and independent character. Their very differences of race and religion counseled them, in spite of their creeds, to preserve their new national life from the sectarian encroachments which rent the national life of the peoples of the Old World . . . True, but these things afford only a very partial explanation. A broader ideal, far broader than the mere mutual tolerance which expediency recommended, irradiated the early work. It breathes the modern spirit, the spirit born in the first years of the French Revolution, for Europe, but appearing first, in a nation's life, in America.

Those who are tempted to think that modern skeptics are putting a new and strained interpretation upon the history of those days would find it useful to consult an obscure and forgotten work of nearly a hundred years ago. In the year 1831 Robert Dale Owen, not an insignificant figure in American history, had a literary debate with a Rev. Mr. Bachelor, a popular pulpit orator who had his little hour and ceased to be. Each wrote ten essays or

letters, and they were published (edited in his own interest by Bachelor) in a *Discussion on the Existence of God and the Authenticity of the Bible* (1840). We shall have frequent occasion to refer to it, and one point is relevant here.

Bachelor had introduced the familiar jibe at irreligion and the French Revolution. Owen had retorted that "three fourths" of the men who wrought the American Revolution and Constitution were just as skeptical as the leaders of the French Revolution. We shall see what detailed evidence he gave; but, when the reverend gentleman raised his plump white hands to heaven and expressed amazement at this latest audacity of the infidel, Owen, writing from Albany, laid before him a newspaper report (*Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 29th, 1831) of a sermon just delivered in that city, apparently without causing any consternation.

The preacher, the Rev. Dr. Wilson, had said in regard to the drafting of the Constitution that "the proceedings, as published by Thompson, the secretary, show that the question was gravely debated in Congress whether God should be in the Constitution or not, and after solemn debate he was deliberately voted out of it." He went on to say that

> the men whose arguments swayed to vote God out of the Constitution, to declare that there should be no religious test, and that Congress should make no law to establish religion were atheists in principle; that among all our Presidents from Washington downward (to 1831) not one was a professor of religion, at least not of more than Uni-

tarianism; that among all the Governors of Pennsylvania and New York only two of the former and one of the latter were professors of religion.

When Owen called upon the preacher, and asked if this was a correct report of his sermon, he said: "I endorse every word of it." I accept the testimony of preachers with discretion, even against their own cause. All that the reader is invited to note here is that in 1831, in the generation which had known the survivors of revolutionary days, my story of the Infidel Fathers was freely told in pulpits. It is no modern invention. It is history.

In other Little Blue Books I have described the progress of Deism in England and the evolution of it into Atheism and Agnosticism in France; and a few facts of the time will at once show the reader how this skepticism spread in the American colonies, and will thus prepare him for a more reasonable consideration of the religion of the early Presidents.

The circumstances which, rather than the hand of God, determine the course of history had opened up the new continent to the English. If that seems an impious expression, consider the facts, as they are ably stated in the first chapter of the seventh volume (*The United States*) of the *Cambridge Modern History.* England, a sea-faring nation from its position, was shut out of the Mediterranean by the European powers, and was checked in northern Europe by the Dutch and the Germans. Even in the exploitation of America, Spain and France were formidable rivals; and the Catholic should note with interest the

reasons which the historian assigns for their failure to exclude England.

Spain, he says, might have founded a mighty empire in America, but "that which an intervening ocean made difficult, the national life of Spain made impossible." The Spanish colonizer employed slaves to do all his work and was himself "barbarized by contact with inferior races;" and "*No tradition of public morality* barred the path of the self-seeking adventurer." As to the French:

> The *bigotry* of Valois kings and Guise statesmen had alienated from them the one element most fit for colonization: the *wars of religion* had drained her natural resources and divided her inhabitants into two hostile camps.

So it fell to Britain to people the invaluable new lands. I am not here concerned with the causes of the secession from Britain or the stupidities of both Church and State in England which occasioned it. Separation was only a matter of time, for it was a necessary and beneficent event.

But the close connection with England lasted long enough to allow English Deistic works to spread, from the early decades of the eighteenth century, among those of the colonists who were now in a position to have leisure and culture. Later we shall find President John Adams, whose radical skepticism is as demonstrable as the Battle of Bunker Hill, telling Jefferson that he began to read Rationalist works before he was twelve years old. This means that Deistic works circulated so freely in provincial Massachusetts as early as 1747 that a youthful

boy could get access to them. Adams' Diary, which he began to keep in 1755, shows that his years at Harvard had encouraged and completed his skepticism, and he tells us on almost every page of critical discussions of religion with neighbors who were often as skeptical as himself.

Benjamin Franklin takes us back to a still earlier date and to a different part of New England. None has ever yet ventured either to question the greatness of Franklin—Fiske says in *Appleton's Encyclopaedia* that he was "in many respects the greatest of Americans"—or to suggest that he derived his idealism from the Bible. The egregious preacher whom I have mentioned, Bachelor, does, it is true, say that Franklin was merely skeptical in his youth and Christian in his maturity. What will preachers not say? Franklin tells us in his *Autobiography* (pp. 185-8, ed. 1909) that he quitted the Presbyterian Church in 1734 and never returned to it; and in a letter of March 9th, 1790, he confesses that his religion is merely that of the Deist.

But it is the beginning of his skepticism that mainly interests us here. He tells us (*Autobiography*) that, reading all sorts of books, as his work in a printer's shop permitted him, he read the works of the English Deists, Shaftesbury and Collins, when he was about fifteen years old—Robertson wrongly says in his *History of Freethought* "in his seventeenth or eighteenth year"—and became a skeptic. Thus in Philadelphia the works of the English Deists were accessible to boys as early as 1720; and

it was they that formed the character and remained throughout life the oracles of America's first scientific thinker, the first to earn world-honors by his genius, the man who had one of the most decisive voices in the framing of the Constitution and who in America's name signed the victorious peace with England.

To Thomas Paine, who entered American life under the auspices of Franklin, another Little Blue Book (No. 1205) is devoted. Paine was actually, as Moncure Conway says, more religious than Franklin, yet some who strain the meaning of words to cover Franklin with the Christain mantle often speak of Paine as an Atheist! We shall see elsewhere the flimsiness of the attacks on him, and will note here only that the man who, from the time when he began to edit the *Pennsylvania Magazine* in 1775, did more than any other to spread in America the finest ideals of the new civilization, the man whose words put fire into the hearts and a clear direction into the minds of the colonists, the man of whom Cobbett bluntly said that, whoever wrote the Constitution, Paine was its author, was, after Voltaire, the most deadly critic of Christianity and the most loyal pupil of the great French Rationalists.

We shall see that Washington, in quite another part of America, must have developed skeptical views about the same time as Franklin, in the thirties; and we shall see that Jefferson, the acknowledged Materialist, testifies to the circulation of Voltaire and other skeptical writers in Virginia in his adolescence.

Gouverneur Morris, another Rationalist of the revolutionary group (as Jefferson will tell us), is a further witness. Colonel Ethan Allen, commander of the famous "Green Mountain Boys," a man whose name is honored in the military annals of the young republic, shows us Deism sufficiently flourishing in Vermont to encourage him to publish the first Deistic work written by an American. It was at Bennington, where a monument to him still exists, that he brought out his *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784), a temperate and unanswerable indictment of Christianity, though written in a turgid style which we no longer appreciate.

But I conclude these glimpses of Rationalism in revolutionary and pre-revolutionary days with a word about Alexander Hamilton, the eminent financial statesman of the new republic; and it will be our first opportunity to expose the insolence with which this very interesting phase of American life is concealed in the interest of religion or in a silly concern about the "respectability" of the Infidel Fathers. Hamilton's grandson, Mr. A. M. Hamilton, published in 1910 an *Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton*. Could there be a more authentic and responsible account of his religious views? Well, the grandson says (p. 334):

> A great deal of canting speculation has been indulged in by various persons as to Hamilton's religious faith, for it was alleged that he died without belief. Bishop Moore's account of his death, on the contrary, shows that he was a man of earnest simple faith.

Speculation on such matters is, indeed, useless, and will not be "indulged in" here; but

for a specimen of cant on the subject I recommend the above passage. For, this very account of Bishop Moore to which the author refers—he gives it on p. 406—shows that Hamilton was a skeptic until his latest years, and that, apparently in his general reaction against the Paine-Jefferson movement, which he detested, he sought a union with the Church. Moore relates that Hamilton, lying on his deathbed after the famous duel (which no literal believer could have fought), said to him: "It has for *some time past* been the wish of my heart, and it was my intention, to take an early opportunity of uniting myself to the Church." Mr. A. M. Hamilton also reproduces a letter written from the dying man's house by Oliver Wolcott, "one of Hamilton's closest friends," which says: "General Hamilton has *of late years* expressed his conviction of the truths of the Christian religion and has desired to receive the sacraments." I did not include Hamilton in my large *Biographical Dictionary of Rationalists* precisely because of this deathbed reception into the Church; though Hamilton's delay until death confronted him gives one cause for thought. But, in slaying these imaginary canting speculators by proving that he *died* a Christian, which no one questions, his grandson has given every reader the impression that he was never otherwise. During the years of his great work for America Hamilton was, the above quotations show, one of the Infidel Fathers. He is another witness to the wide spread of Rationalism in the early days;

another great figure of the Revolution who belonged to the brilliant regiment of heretics.

I need not prolong this preliminary inquiry. Some American historian ought to ascertain and relate to the world the full extent of this remarkable spread of skepticism in the eighteenth century. The reader will have as much as he can expect to find in this little work if I prove that the seven Presidents of the United States to whom I now devote separate chapters were skeptics. I ask only a common-sense decision, but a difficulty, a natural reluctance to admit so unfamiliar a view will have been removed by these indications that the English and French Deists were widely read in the most diverse parts of the colony before the flag of independence was unfurled even in the imagination of the colonists.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE WASHINGTON A DEIST

Against the group of Infidel Fathers whom I have named—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Franklin, Paine, and Hamilton—it would be quite impossible to set six great Americans of the time, six men who had equal influence in the creation of the new civilization, who made a plain profession of belief in the doctrines of any Christian Church. The aim, therefore, of those who dislike the significance of this heroic band of heretics, is, by fair means or fallacious, to detach as many as possible from the group.

To attempt this in the case of Jefferson would be as amusing as it would be to attempt it in the case of Paine; the more conscientious Christian biographers, we shall see, admit that the heresy of Adams was equally drastic and undeniable; the Deism of Franklin only a literary crook could attempt to obscure; and Hamilton, we have just seen, remained outside the Churches until the last day of his life. But George Washington! Here every trick of the trade of apologetics is employed to prove that the father of his country was a good Christian. For a century men have fought over the issue, and I have no new evidence to offer. All that I propose to do is to examine very carefully the evidence on both sides and leave the decision to the reader. There can be only one verdict from any impartial juryman.

And it is clear from the outset that plain statements of his position in religion, such as we find abundantly in the works of Adams and Jefferson, cannot be expected in the case of Washington. In the first place he had no culture in the least approaching that of Adams or Jefferson, who quote the Greek and Latin classics as freely as they quote the Christian Fathers or the physiocrats of France. Put to the business of surveying at an early age, called to the command of armies in early manhood, and then to the helm of state, his reading was necessarily limited, and he cannot have worked out so definite a philosophy as his successors did. But even such skepticism as he had could not find expression as theirs did. It is mainly during their long period of retirement from office that we find Adams and Jefferson freely discussing religious questions. Washington had retired but three years when death ended his great career; and no man in his senses would expect to find any skeptical utterance by him either during his command of the armies or his occupation of the presidential chair. Millions of pairs of religious eyes were upon him.

But let us take up at once the evidence for his orthodoxy which is offered us by the greatest authority on the religious side, Jared Sparks, in his *Life of Washington*. Moncure Conway (who, by the way, unhesitatingly calls Washington a Deist) assures us that Sparks was an estimable man, and, if he does at times stiffen the weakness of his case by the strength of his assurances, he knows better than to

treat the Rationalist position with contempt, and his generally conscientious work rebukes the utterly mendacious popular accounts of Washington's faith which are given in the works of men like Weems. Let us respectfully and impartially consider all that Mr. Sparks has to say.

The first proof is that amongst the very interesting note-books which survive from Washington's boyhood there is a Christian hymn which he copied out. I do certainly not suggest that as a boy of thirteen Washington was a Deist, but Mr. Sparks, who is merely bent on proving his case, not on a scholarly inquiry, fails to recognize that even here there is something which makes one wonder. Amongst these documents written by the boy is a series of "Rules of Behavior"; a very remarkable compilation of practical moral sentiments for a boy of thirteen. Sparks reproduces this in his Appendix. It is generally referred to as a collection of "moral and religious maxims," and the common biographer (who has probably never read it) gives his reader to understand that it fully reflects George's simple piety. Quite the contrary. The document contains fifty-seven "rules," each a few lines in length, yet there is only one sentence which has the least reference to religion. It is: "When you speak of God or his attributes, let it be seriously and in reverence." That is exactly what Paine or any other Deist would say. I wonder. . . . Well, let us say that we wonder if the unknown author from whom the boy copied his rules of behavior was not one of the English Deists. Jesus is not mentioned.

Mr. Sparks next observes that during his military command Washington had religious services in camp and tried to prevent his soldiers from swearing. No one, surely, will admit here the inference that he was a Christian. Washington was a Puritan, and the only available agency for checking what he regarded as the demoralizing disorders of his men was the usual religious service. I stress the fact that even in camp Washington was a Puritan. It is the very heroism of virtue to try to prevent a body of American troops from swearing. Remember this, for it will put Mr. Sparks in a serious dilemma presently. He makes a special point of the fact that on one occasion Washington ordered a fast as prescribed by the Church. Naturally, if he counted on the Church to give his men discipline; and just as naturally, if he ordered the fast, the least he could do was to fast himself.

A vague reference to "all his writings" is the next proof, and so I turn to *The Writings of George Washington* (1837), in twelve volumes, edited by Mr. Sparks himself. What occurs to one at once in running over the pages so that the eye will catch the capital letters of religious phrases, is that Washington does indeed liberally sprinkle his addresses with reference to God, but these are generally couched in Deistic, not Church, language. It is the "Supreme Ruler of the Universe," the "Parent of the Universe," the "Author of the Universe," and so on. However, by diligent search the pious editor has discovered *one* document containing *two* apparently Christian phrases.

These two phrases in twelve large volumes, two expressions used in a long official career during which Washington had repeatedly to address the clergy, are the only serious evidence on the orthodox side! Significant, isn't it?

The first phrase—they are contained in a circular letter to the Governors of States on June 8th, 1783—is a reference to "the pure and benign light of Revelation" and the second a reference to "the Divine Author of our blessed religion." But before you say to yourself "That settles it," let me give you a further quotation by Sparks from his works. Writing to Lafayette, a Deist, on Agust 15th, 1787, Washington says, commending his efforts on behalf of toleration: "Being no bigot myself, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the Churches with that road to heaven which to them shall seem the most direct, plainest, easiest, and least liable to exception" (p. 404). Well, that settles it just as clearly on the Deist side; in fact, more clearly, for it is a private letter, not a semi-political address, and it is language which people do not take figuratively as well as literally. In this one personal and confidential statement of his ideas George Washington sharply dissociates himself from "the professors of Christianity"—the phrase in those days for believing Christians—and sneers at their belief; and the letter is given by the pious biographer Sparks himself.

In plain English, surely, Washington stretched a point in his circular letter. The very most you could claim is that he had a

sort of Christian mood on him for a short time. He was understood to be a member of the Church. He attended service weekly. So, like Professor Osborn and Sir Oliver Lodge today, like hundreds of statesmen, he genially recognizes some sort of "revelation" given in the "benign" Christian religion by its "Divine Author," God. The rest of the evidence compels us to think this, and it is done daily by highly respectable modern Deists.

In this same section of the *Writings* in which Sparks discusses Washington's religion there is reproduced a very important and admirable letter of Bishop White, the clergyman in charge of the church which Washington attended when he was President. Sparks has asked the bishop for a statement and has particularly desired to know if the President *knelt* for prayers. Sparks honestly inserts the reply in the *Writings* (p. 408) in 1837; and in 1852, in his *Life of Washington*, he dishonestly suppresses it. For it is almost a decisive proof that Washington was a Deist.

Washington attended church regularly, says the bishop; and we all know *that*. So did John Adams, even when he was in no official position and was writing heresy every day in his Diary. All sorts of people besides politicians attend church without believing in the divinity of Jesus. But to Sparks' second question Bishop White gives a surprising reply: "I owe it to the truth to declare that I never saw him in the said attitude." Naturally, this clergyman in charge knew whether Washington knelt or not. He did not; and, the Bishop

adds—we will consider this presently—he always left before the communion. No serious person can fail to see some significance in this. The most absolutely reliable witness tells us that although President of the State, the beheld of all beholders, Washington refused to kneel in church or to remain for the communion.

The truthful bishop—*rara avis*—adds that, though he often dined with Washington, he "never heard anything from him which could manifest his opinions on the subpect of religion." When he ceased to be President, the church sent a deputation to him, yet, in his reply to his "co-parishioners," says the bishop sadly, there was "nothing that committed him relatively to the religious theory." The bishop is very plainly of opinion that Washington was a skeptic, though a nominal Christian. So the honest Sparks—the nearest approach to an honest writer on Washington's religion on the Christian side—suppressed this most important letter when he came to write the classic *Life of Washington.*

Let us return to the "proofs" in the *Life.* The next is the testimony of an unnamed granddaughter of Mrs. Washington who lived in the family for "twenty years." Why not name her in so highly respectable a connection? She must, as I work it out, have been Eleanor P. Custis, and, if so, it is pretty apparent why Sparks left her anonymous. She was not admitted to Washington's home until seventeen years before he died, and she was a mere child when she was adopted. However, Eleanor merely tells us what Bishop White

has told us—that Washington attended church, but never remained for communion, although his wife did. She adds that, as Washington spent some time in his library before breakfast and an hour in it before retiring, she *thinks* that he practiced private devotions morning and evening; but neither she nor any other member of the family *knew* whether he did or not. In a word, like Bishop White, she confirms our suspicion of skepticism.

In regard to private prayer we next have the testimony of a pious gentleman, a nephew of Washington, who told Sparks (no documents given, of course) that he once saw Washington kneeling in prayer, and *believed* that he did this every morning and evening. Let us pass on. Forty or fifty years after the supposed event an old gentleman believes that he once surprised Washington kneeling. . . . And out of this has grown the whole legend of Washington saying his prayers night and morning.

The last evidence given by Sparks is a quotation from Dr. Hosack's *Life of De Witt Clinton.* It is a story that Washington did once actually communicate. Hosack, a clergyman, was told by another clergyman (Cox) that he heard this story from a third clergyman who heard it from a fourth clergyman; and it refers to a supposed occurrence of fifty years earlier! Such is the kind of evidence for the orthodoxy of Washington.

This steady refusal to communicate troubles Sparks. I may insert here that it also troubled Bachelor, and he wrote to a clergyman at Mount Vernon (thirty years after Washington's

death) for evidence. This man honestly replied that he failed to get "something decisive." There were no records, and, while people said that Washington did communicate, the parson could not find a single old person who remembered ever communicating with him. A granddaughter of the parson of Washington's day said that her grandfather told her that Washington did communicate; at what time of his life she does not say.

The facts are clear enough. Here Sparks is right. In his earlier years at Mount Vernon Washington communicated; but, as Sparks says, he clearly ceased to communicate, apparently before 1750, and the testimony of his granddaughter and of Bishop White are decisive that he pointedly left the church ever after when the communion was to be given.

Sparks is seriously disturbed by this, and his explanation is desperate. Washington, in the rough life of the camp, may have thought it "improper" to take part in an "ordinance which imposed severe restrictions on outward conduct." Washington the Puritan! Washington who in camp was shocked at soldiers swearing! Moreover, Washington refused for *the rest of his life* to communicate. What does common sense say? Surely, that Washington the Deist felt himself at liberty to go to church, and worship and pray to the God in whom he certainly believed, but he was too fine a man to touch the communion cup with his lips, as that was a distinctively Christian act.

I have now given the whole of the supposed evidence for Washington's orthodoxy. Most of

it is actually evidence not of orthodoxy but heresy, and only two phrases in one document require any serious explanation. Let us set against these some further evidence of heresy.

R. D. Owen, in the work quoted (p. 231), reproduces these words of the Rev. Dr. Wilson of Albany in his sermon:

> Washington was not a professor of religion, at least until after he was President. When the Congress sat at Philadelphia, Washington attended the Episcopal church. The [assistant] rector, Dr. Abercrombie, has told me that, on the days when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be administered, Washington's custom was to rise, just before the ceremony commenced, and to walk out of the church. This became a subject of remark in the congregation, as setting a bad example. At length the doctor undertook to speak of it, with a direct allusion to the President. Washington was heard afterwards to remark that this was the first time a clergyman had preached to him, and that he would henceforth neither trouble the doctor nor his congregation on such occasions. And ever after that, upon communion days, he absented himself altogether from the church.

All that Bachelor can reply to this is that he has a letter on the subject from Dr. Abercrombie, who refuses to let him publish the letter (!), but says that he did not tell Wilson that Washington was a Deist. In conversation with Owen, Wilson had said that Abercrombie had "emphatically" concluded: "Sir, Washington was a Deist." We leave this quarrel about a word to the two doctors of divinity. The rest of the passage stands; and that is why Abercrombie (and Bachelor) did not want the letter published.

Next Jefferson. There was no love between

Jefferson and Washington in their later years, and one does not need to explain the cynical note of this passage, which Jefferson wrote in his Diary on February 1st, 1799:

> Dr. Rush tells me that he had it from Asa Green that when the clergy addressed General Washington on his departure from the government, it was observed in their consultation that he never, on any occasion, said a word to the public which showed a belief in the Christian religion, and they thought they should so pen their address as to force him at length to declare publicly whether he was a Christian or not. They did so. However, he observed, the old fox was too cunning for them. He answered every article of their address particularly except that, which he passed over without notice. Rush observes he never did say a word on the subject in any of his public papers except in his valedictory letter to the Governors of the States when he resigned his commission in the army, wherein he speaks of "the benign influence of the Christian religion."
>
> I know that Gouverneur Morris, who pretended to be in his secrets and believed himself to be so, has often told me that General Washington believed no more of that system than he himself did (*Memoir*, etc. IV, 512).

Sparks tells us that Dr. Green afterwards denied that he told the above story to Dr. Rush. We are getting accustomed to these reverend gentlemen exchanging confidences over a glass of wine and then, when there is a public row, disowning them. We have not Dr. Green's words, and will take it that his denial was vague and diplomatic. In any case, Morris, who was intimate with Washington, "often" told Jefferson that both of them disbelieved in Christianity, and Jefferson, who ought to know, was of the same opinion.

Finally, and most important of all, there is the authentic account of Washington's last days. In the popular lives of Washington, such as that of the Rev. Mr. Weems, Washington's end is related with deliberate and luscious mendacity. It is said that he asked everybody to leave the room, that he might spend his last hour alone with his maker; and one then reads the very words of his prayers, the ardor of his attitude—after every witness had left the room. The authentic account is in Sparks' *Life*, and it is so significant that the pious author refrains from attempting to explain it.

If I am, as my Christian friends shudderingly tell me, to die like a dog, George Washington died like a dog. He was aware for hours that the end was near, but he sent for no clergyman and said no prayers. One may fairly assume that, as is usual, religious relatives wished to send for a clergyman. If so, Washington forbade them. God and the hope of heaven were not mentioned. And, when his will was opened, they read: "It is my express desire that my corpse may be interred in a private manner, without parade or funeral oration." A plain desire for a secular funeral, which they disregarded, hiring a clergyman to pray and speak over his remains.

So there, gentlemen of the jury, you have the whole of the evidence. The issue is, remember, not whether Washington attended church, but what he believed. The *undisputed* facts are that he, at least after his twenty-fifth year, never took the communion, and that even as President he persisted in his refusal in face of

scandal; that only on one occasion during the whole of his life he used language which might imply that he was more than a Deist, and this language (which many a skeptic in high position has used) occurs in a public document; that shortly afterwards he in a private letter to Lafayette expressly dissociated himself from "the professors of Christianity"; that, on the certain testimony of his clergyman, he refused to kneel for the prayers in church; that he resisted every attempt to induce him to say that he was a Christian, knowing well that he was suspected of heresy; that his friend Morris said he was a Deist; that, in fine, when death confronted him and all the diplomacy of terrestrial life was ending, he bravely told the world, by his action, what he really thought of the Christian religion.

What is your verdict, gentlemen? The Father of his Country was beyond any serious question one of the Infidel Fathers.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN ADAMS THE SKEPTIC

Were it necessary in each chapter to analyze the evidence on both sides as I have done in the case of Washington, this Little Blue Book would expand into a very big Blue Book. Fortunately it is quite unnecessary in the case of the second, third, and fourth Presidents, and it will not be possible in the case of the fifth because there is very little evidence to examine. With Lincoln we shall again have to disentangle a mass of apparently conflicting testimonies.

John Adams, second President, one of the most cultivated Americans of his age and, in the words of a recent biographer, "The Statesman of the Revolution," believed far less about God and a future life than Voltaire or Thomas Paine, and he rejected the doctrines, as distinct from the ethic, of Christianity with contempt. The only apparent difference of opinion that I have to face here is that his grandson and biographer, a devout Unitarian, while plainly stating his rejection of every Christian tenet, brings him a little too near to the Unitarians. He says (*Life of John Adams*, 1871, II, 384-5):

> He devoted himself to a very elaborate examination of the religions of all ages and nations, the results of which he committed to paper in a desultory manner. The issue of it was the formation of

his theological opinions very much in the mould adopted by the Unitarians of New England. Rejecting, with the independent spirit which in early life had driven him from the ministry, the prominent doctrines of Calvinism, the trinity, the atonement, and election, he was content to settle down upon the Sermon on the Mount as a perfect code presented to man by a more than moral teacher. Further he declined to analyze the mysterious nature of his [Christ's] mission. In this faith he lived with uninterrupted serenity, and in it he died with perfect resignation.

After this authoritative assurance that he rejected the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Divinity of Christ, we might forthwith pass him as one of the Infidel Fathers; for any man who in the eighteenth century uttered such denials was a Deist and an Infidel. But there are two seriously misleading phrases in this passage, as John Adams' own words will show.

The grandson does not claim that he was a Unitarian, but he exaggerates even in saying that his opinions were "very much" the same as those of the Unitarians. Adams was a skeptic as to the nature of God, or the Supreme Power, as he preferred to say, and he did not believe that life was immortal. Professor Fiske is nearer the mark when he says in *Appleton's Cyclopaedia:* "Later in life he was sometimes called a Unitarian, but of dogmatic Christianity he seems to have had as little as Franklin or Jefferson." He had less theistic belief than Franklin, who had less than Paine; and as to Jefferson, we find that statesman writing to him (*Memoir*, IV, 331), in acknowledging Adams' last letter: "Its crowd of skepticisms kept me from sleep."

Yet it is interesting to examine many of the expressions of John Adams, and any reader who may not have reached a firm verdict on Washington's beliefs in the last chapter will find a little further assistance here. In the last private letter of Adams that is included in his *Works*, a short note to his son John Quincy Adams on February 18th, 1825, he says: "May the blessing of God Almighty continue to protect you to the end of your life, as it has heretofore protected you in so remarkable a manner from your cradle. I offer the same prayer for your lady and your family." A clerical writer would at once quote this and leave his readers indignantly wondering why any man ever pronounced Adams a skeptic. But less than a month earlier (January 22nd, 1825) he had written this to Jefferson:

As to your author, though I wish to see the book, I look upon it as a mere game of pushpin. Incision-knives will never discover the distinction between matter and spirit or *whether there is any or not.* That there is an active principle of power in the universe is apparent; but in what substance that active principle resides is *past our investigation. The faculties of our understanding are not adequate to penetrate the universe.* Let us do our duty, which is to do as we would be done by; and that, one would think, could not be difficult, if we honestly aim at it.

The Europeans are all deeply tainted with prejudices, both ecclesiastical and temporal, which they can never get rid of. They are all infected with episcopalian and presbyterian creeds and confessions and faiths. They all believe that the Great Principle which has produced this boundless universe, Newton's universe and Herschell's universe, came down to this little ball to be spit upon

by Jews. And until this *awful blasphemy* is got rid of there never will be any liberal science in the world (*Works of John Adams*, X, 414-5).

From this plain declaration we see that when Adams uses familiar religious terms, as above, he is not to be taken literally; and we have a clue to the use of such terms by Washington and others. Adams also, like Washington on one occasion, uses the word "revelation" and greatly praises Christianity (in a letter to Dr. Rush on January 21st, 1810), but his words must be understood in the light of these declarations which occur throughout his works. In the first paragraph of the above final and most explicit statement of his beliefs he professes, not Unitarianism or anything like it, but almost the Agnosticism of Herbert Spencer; and in the second paragraph his violent repudiation of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ puts the assertion of his grandson, that he regarded Christ as "a more than moral teacher," in a peculiar light. He certainly did not. He ridiculed the idea of the divinity of Christ all his life. No doctrine offended him more.

I could quote dozens of passages like the above, but it will be enough to add just a few quotations from the Diary which he kept in his early manhood (*Works*, vol. II) and from the letters which he exchanged with Jefferson from 1816 to 1825 (vols. IX and X).

Adams was the son of a comfortable farmer, who could afford to send him to Harvard. He was intended for and began to study for the

ministry, but, says Professor Fiske, "he soon found himself too much of a freethinker to feel at home in the pulpit of that day." Writing to a correspondent on July 8th, 1820, he says that he began to read critical books about religion before he was twelve years old; a fact which I have already cited in proof of the very early spread of Deistic literature in America.

Returning from Harvard and adopting the study of law, he in 1856 started to keep a diary. On the second page of it he tells of some neighbor conversing with him on religion, and adds: "Thus mystery is made a convenient cover for absurdity." The topic was the divinity of Christ. Already, in his twenty-first year, Adams was drastically anti-Christian and anti-clerical. Week by week, especially after the Sunday sermon, he vents his contemptuous skepticism in his secret note-book. Two days after the sentence quoted he has a fierce attack on the bishops; on the next day a vigorous lunge at "the influence of ignorant or wicked priests," and two days later again the following:

> Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cartloads of other trumpery that we find religion encumbered with in these days?

He notes every few days a critical discussion of religion with a neighbor, often a skeptic like himself. One has just come back from Europe a complete Atheist, he says. Adams is reading the Deist Bolingbroke, and only differs from him in still claiming that miracles are

possible. He is a complete Deist before he is thirty.

Now let us glance at his opinions during the last ten years of his life, when Jefferson was pestering him with his dogmatic Materialism. He rejects it, as he also dislikes the pungent criticisms of Paine. In the letter to Dr. Rush which I have quoted (January 31st, 1810) he expresses his dislike for Paine, but adds: "His Deism, as it appears to me, has promoted rather than retarded the cause of revolution in America, and even in Europe." One may recommend this opinion of a great President of the United States, an eye-witness of the events and a fine scholar, to the glib preachers who talk about Deism and the French Revolution. In 1815, July 13th, we find him writing to a friend that he has studied religion all his life and "*sub judice lis est*"—the whole thing is still disputed. All that he has kept is a "love of God and my neighbor." Like most Deists, he believes also in "a future state of rewards and punishments, but not eternal."

These letters are generally to Christians, and to men with whom he is not intimate. Next year, 1816, his correspondence with Jefferson, after a reconciliation, opened, and here we get his thoughts in their most candid expression. He is quite cynical about "the eternal quest." His usual name for it is that it is a game of "pushpin":

> With such games of pushpin have the childish philosophers of all ages diverted and distracted themselves, not once considering that neither human sense, nor imagination, nor intellect, was ever

formed to comprehend all things. Harris' Dialogue on Happiness is worth all the metaphysical researches of philosophers, from the beginning of the world, into the nature of matter and spirit, of energy, of power, of activity, of motion, or any such thing. When we say God is a spirit we know what we mean as well as we do when we say that the Pyramids of Egypt are matter. Let us be content, therefore, to believe him to be a spirit; that is, *an essence that we know nothing of,* in which originally and necessarily reside all energy, all power, all capacity, all activity, all wisdom, all goodness. Behold the creed and confession of faith of your ever affectionate friend.

I believe that it is to this letter that Jefferson refers—he misquotes the date—when he speaks of "its crowd of skepticisms." In truth it is not far from Agnosticism of the Spencer type. I have already shown that it was the creed of Adams in 1825, just before his death.

Well, you say, that's settled. Scores of quotations of this kind show that John Adams was very decidedly an Infidel Father . . . Wait a moment. The Rev. Mr. Bachelor, in the work to which I have referred (p. 164), quotes a letter he has received from the clergyman of the Congregationalist church which Adams attended sometimes at Quincy, and the parson gives this amazing description of the distinguished member of his flock:

Mr. Adams was unquestionably one of the most thoroughly established believers in the divine mission of Jesus Christ [which he declared an "awful blasphemy"] and the truth of his religion ["loads of trumpery"]. He had not only critically examined the evidences of the side of Christianity, but he had read almost all the Deistic writers, and the

result of his examination was a deep conviction of the truth of our holy religion. (!?* !)

You see the point. These clerical testimonials to the orthodoxy of great men are worth—well, worth a certain number of dollars to the Church.

CHAPTER IV.

THOMAS JEFFERSON THE MATERIALIST

The bugbear of the preacher in America just now is Materialism. The inquiring public—if there is such a thing—is disconcerted to hear Popery branded as whoredom on one side of the street and adorned with a halo of silvery sanctity on the other; to find Fundamentalism alternately described as the foundation stone of American civilization and the last symptom of medieval ignorance. But all the preachers can unite on one theme: the devastating, demoralizing, withering, blighting effect upon American ideals of Materialism. Here, in fact, the professors and all the respectable skeptics join the choir of angels. You may cut out God and Christ, you may describe the ten commandments as the stone-mason theory of morals, but you introduce a corrosive acid amongst the very foundations of civilized life if you—declare that the mind of man is quantitative and not qualitative.

Another Little Blue Book deals with this "sham fight of Materialism and Spiritualism," as my friend the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson calls it. Meantime let me establish that the third President of the United States was, not merely an Infidel Father, not a polite skeptic whose words are open to different interpretations, but a dogmatic Materialist all his life.

And, though some of my readers may dissent from Jefferson's later political development and others admire it, the whole world must know that no other man had a greater influence in embodying in the American Constitution the highest ideals known to the race in the eighteenth century.

Let me add that Jefferson was not a busy lawyer or statesman who was superficially attracted in leisure hours by the positiveness of the new French Materialism. Adams and he—significantly, the two deepest skeptics of the time—were the most scholarly men of the whole revolutionary group. In his letters to Adams he quotes Greek, Latin, and French writers—Fathers of the Church and the latest philosophers of Europe—with easy familiarity. He was no philosopher. I grant that at once to the metaphysicians who now monopolize the name. But he was a shrewd and tireless thinker, intent all his life on the greater problems of existence, and he never wavered in his conviction that "spirit" is an impossibility and matter only exists.

To state his creed succinctly, Jefferson believed in God, but held, like the Stoics (whom he may have followed), that even God is material or ethereal. He maintained that the Creator "endowed matter with the power of thought," and that man had no "soul." It follows, though I cannot find that he ever explicitly spoke of this, that to him personal immortality was a myth. Of Jesus, whose divinity he as flatly denied as Adams did, he used language that varied at times, but I will quote

him saying that the supposed, and probably spurious, teaching of Jesus in the Gospels is full of absurdities. St. Paul and all the dogma-makers of Christianity, and all the dogmas and priesthoods, he regarded with a fierce contempt.

As I have never seen any other serious version of Jefferson's creed—for no different version is seriously possible—I have merely to append a few passages from his letters. Let me first recommend a recent French work of Professor G. Chinard, of John Hopkins University, *Jefferson et les idéologues* (1925). Its chief purpose is to give hitherto unpublished letters of the great democrat to the French philosophers to whom Franklin introduced him in Paris. They refer mainly to politics and economics, but the atmosphere will help the reader to understand Jefferson. As a youth in America he had read, in studying law, the great Rationalists Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Voltaire, and in later life he reveled in Volney's *Ruins* (part of which he translated) and Dupuis (who started the solar-myth theory of religion). But his chief friends were Destutt de Tracy, Condorcet, Cabanis, and Say, all Materialists.

His philosophy is, of course, best seen in the correspondence of his later years (*Memoir and Correspondence of T. Jefferson*, 4 vols., 1829) and I select a few of the scores of identical passages that might be quoted from these. On January 11th, 1817, he writes to Adams:

> The result of your fifty or sixty years of religious reading in the four words, "Be just and good," is that in which all inquiries must end; as

the riddles of all the priesthoods end in four more, *"Ubi panis, ibi Deus"* [God is where our bread is]. What all agree in is probably right. What no two agree in is probably wrong. One of our fan-coloring biographers, who paints small men as very great, inquired of me lately, and with real affection too, whether he might consider as authentic the change in my religion much spoken of in some circles. Now this supposes that they knew what had been my religion before, taking for it the word of their priests, whom I certainly never made the confidants of my creed. My answer was: "Say nothing of my religion. It is known to myself and my God alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life; if that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one."

On May 5th, 1817, he writes:

I join you in sincere congratulations that this den of the priesthood is at length broken up, and that a Protestant Popedom is no longer to disgrace the American history and character. If by *religion* we are to understand *sectarian dogmas*, in which no two of them agree, then your exclamation on that hypothesis is just, "that this would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it." But if the moral precepts, innate in man, and made a part of his physical constitution, as necessary for a social being, if the sublime doctrines of philanthropism and deism taught us by Jesus Christ of Nazareth, in which all agree, constitute true religion, then without it, this would be as you again say, "something not fit to be named, even indeed in a hell."

The quotation from Adams—the letter has, apparently, been suppressed in J. C. Adams' edition of his grandfather's works—reads ironically after the testimonial to that statesman's perfect orthodoxy from his pastor. Piquant, too, in view of his reference to Protestant Popedom, is a line in Jefferson's letter of

May 17th: "I am glad he [Holly] is gone to Kentucky. Rational Christianity will thrive more rapidly there than here." At the date April 13th, 1820, we find (IV, 321) a letter to Mr. Short which more than any illustrates his real attitude toward Christianity. He is sending Short a copy of a "syllabus" on Christianity which he had written for Dr. Rush, and which must be kept strictly private. It has been printed in a London magazine, but happily, says Jefferson, no American eyes will ever see that. Its object is

> to place the character of Jesus in its true and high light as a reformer of the Hebrew code of religion. . . . It is not to be understood that I am with him in all his doctrines: I am a Materialist, he takes the side of Spiritualism. . . . Among the sayings and discoveries imputed to him I find [many beautiful, but] other passages of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism, and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. . . . stupidity of some and roguery of others of his disciples. . . . Of this band of dupes and impostors Paul was the great Coryphaeus and first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus.

The letter ends with a fierce attack on the Presbyterians and all "tritheists." On August 4th, 1820, Jefferson writes again to Short on the same subject, and the letter, while praising the character and teaching of Jesus in the dithyrambric manner of the time, shows what Jefferson thought of the legend of his divinity. He says: "He might readily mistake the corusca-

tions of his own fine genius for inspirations of a higher order." On June 26th, 1822, he writes in the same vein to Dr. Waterhouse. He evidently brooded for decades over the gospel problem and never wavered in his solution. In this letter he speaks of Athanasius and Calvin as "impious dogmatists." The Fundamentalists of the southern states ought to be interested to know that President Jefferson thought Jesus a blameless enthusiast with delusions, Paul an impostor, and Athanasius and Calvin enemies of the human race.

On December 8th, 1822, he writes to James Smith—half the distinguished Americans who correspond with him seem to have been skeptics like himself—in the same vein. The early Christian Church, he rightly says, believed in only one God:

> Nor was the unity of the Supreme Being ousted from the Christian creed by the force of reason, but by the force of civil Government wielded at the will of the fanatical Athanasius. . . . The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousands and thousands of martyrs.

I must add, since these extracts cannot convey it, that Jefferson knew well of what he was talking. He quoted Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church freely. In the end we get the same note of Agnosticism as in Adams. On April 11th, 1823, he writes to Adams: "I think any Christian sect gives a great handle to Atheism by their general dogma that with-

out a revelation there would not be sufficient proof of the being of a God." There *is* a God, he argues against his French friends, but, beyond the fact that he must be compacted of some finer matter "of the nature of this being we know nothing."

CHAPTER V.

JAMES MADISON AND JAMES MONROE

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the same day, almost in the same hour; and, by a still more remarkable coincidence, the day was July 4th, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. To that last hour neither faltered in his allegiance to the creed of life which he had constructed in his early manhood. Revelation and priesthood they sternly rejected: the Trinity they scorned: and God they held to be inscrutable to human reason and made known in no revelation. Washington, we saw, must have held a similar creed, though he had not, like them, the culture or the leisure to formulate it so definitely or the same freedom to express it. With them died the heroic age of the new civilization. Paine, Franklin, and Hamilton had departed long before.

That the fresh idealism of the new Republic which these men had done so much to inspire had faded somewhat, that it would need another national crisis, when again we shall find a great Rationalist at the helm, to reanimate the old spirit, is a commonplace of American history. From the point of view of this little work I have only to note that politics became a trade in which the merchant had to consult every prejudice of his customers, and that the

millions of new folk who now poured into the great open land from benighted Europe, bringing all their illiteracy and superstition, swamped the fine liberality which the Deists had subtly disseminated.

It remains an historical fact that Rationalists ruled America, and were its main inspirers, for nearly fifty years, for we have now to see that President Madison was as skeptical as the most Rationalistic of his predecessors; that there is good evidence that President Monroe was a Rationalist; and that the sixth President, John Quincy Adams, was not a Christian in a sense that the Church of America would recognize even today, and can only be placed in the category because in the nineteenth century the Unitarian wing, or annex, of the Christion body afforded hospitality to those who had hitherto been called Deists and Infidels.

James Madison was both in character and culture, a worthy successor of Adams and Jefferson. Fiske, an impartial and competent judge, describes him as "pre-eminently the scholar, the profound constructive thinker" of the early Republic, and says that "for minute and thorough knowledge of ancient and modern history and of constitutional law he was unequaled among the Americans of the Revolutionary period."

He had also a knowledge which few Presidents have, and of which Fiske is not entirely aware. He had a first class knowledge of theology and had made a profound study of religious questions. The tutor who prepared him for Princeton was a pious clergyman, and

he remained a year at Princeton, after graduating, to learn Hebrew and theology. All his family were of the strictest religious type, and he was intended for the ministry. He refused, yet he still devoted himself critically for years to religious studies. When Jefferson was selecting the books for the library of his University, he applied to Madison for a list of volumes on theology, and the list, included in Madison's *Writings*, shows a very remarkable command of religious literature on the part of a layman. Yet Madison was unqestionably an Infidel Father; he was one of the most heretical of them all.

The Rev. Dr. Wilson, the Albany preacher who said from his pulpit, and repeated to R. D. Owen, that all the Presidents to Jackson were Deists, had personally spoken with Madison. Owen says (p. 231): "He inquired himself, he said, of Madison what were his opinions on religion, and Madison evaded any expression whatever of his religious faith." He was, in fact, more reticent than his predecessors, but—and it is a very significant "but"—he was reticent both ways: he, unlike them, sprinkles no "God Almightys" over his letters and addresses. John Quincy Adams, in his supposed *Life of Madison*—it is only an obituary oration—makes him believe in a "Redeemer" and "Mediator." J. Q. Adams was the first Churchy President (though one of the Unitarian shade), and he has in these things all the defects of the Churches.

Madison was openly anti-clerical all his life. The Churches had no more determined op-

ponent whenever they sought to lodge themselves in the life of Republic. W. C. Rives, his first biographer (*History of the Life and Times of James Madison*, 2 vols., 1859), tells at length the story of how he had the wording of the Virginia Declaration of Rights altered. The original draft granted "toleration" to all, and added words which might lend some color to occasional persecution. Young and retiring as Madison then was, he fought so earnestly that "toleration" (which implies an orthodox concession to the heterodox) and the following words were replaced by "all men are equally entitled to the full and free exercise of it [religion], according to the dictates of conscience." The successive drafts which Rives gives show also that in another clause a reference to "God and Nature" was deleted, and this seems to have been the work of Madison. Later Rives gives the "Memorial and Remonstrance" of Madison against a proposal to endow "Teachers of the Christian Religion" in Virginia, which he defeated. On every such occasion it was Madison who defeated the clergy.

His letters rarely mention religion, but they tell us enough. A letter to Edward Everett on March 19th, 1823, urges him to oppose all theological encroachments in the educational world, and not see their University become "an Arena of Theological Gladiators." Religion needs no endowment, he says, and he uses what seems to have been his common formula on such occasions: "The settled opinion here is . . . that there are causes in the human breast which ensure the perpetuity of religion

without the aid of the law." Most certainly this detached Deistic attitude was *not* the "settled opinion" in Virginia, but this was Madison's favorite maxim. In a letter, marked "private," of the year 1832 (his eighty-third year) to a clergyman who tried to draw him he uses the same formula. The letter begins:

> I received in due time the printed copy of your Convention sermon on the relation of Christianity to civil government, with a manuscript request of my opinion on the subject.
>
> There appears to be in the nature of man what insures his belief in an invisible cause of his present existence and anticipation of his future existence. Hence the propensities and susceptibilities in that case of religion which, with a few doubtful or individual exceptions have prevailed throughout the world (*Writings*, IX, 485).

The clergyman must have shivered. The ex-President does not even say that he himself accepted the cold Deistic formula in which he expresses religion; and the remarkable and unusual absence of religious expressions from his documents makes one wonder whether he was not, in fact, an Agnostic.

He was often claimed as such, says Gaillard Hunt, his editor and biographer, in the preface to his Writings (p. xxi, vol. I). Hunt evades the question of his religion in his *Life of James Madison* (1902), but he is more candid in the short preface to his works. Madison was, he says, "a profoundly religious man," but no evidence for this is put before us. That, however, his religion was not Christianity is made quite plain. He was "an advanced thinker on religious subjects." He was "a strong man

who walked through life alone and did not disclose his inner thoughts on vital personal questions. What his religion was has thus always been a matter of dispute." Hunt, an official biographer, naturally wishes to make his distinguished hero "respectable"; but the idea that a President of the Republic was a Christian and took such pains all his life to conceal the fact is a notion that he could not for a moment entertain. At the most Madison was a Deist; but there is serious reason to think that he was less.

In the case of James Monroe, who, like Madison, was an intimate friend of Jefferson and was freely put in the same class of "infidels," there is very little positive evidence about his opinions, but it leaves no room for reasonable doubt. The recent biography by George Morgan (*Life of James Monroe*, 1921) is significantly silent about his religion, and one can gather from it only that Monroe died without prayer or religious ministrations—like his four predecessors. John Quincy Adams in his obituary oration does not in the case of Monroe venture to use any of the religious expletives with which he is so liberal, and one finds nothing but an instructive silence in Monroe's writings. Unpublished letters to Jefferson might tell much.

One thing we do know: it was actually in Monroe's house that Paine wrote the second part of his *Age of Reason*. It was Monroe, the new minister at Paris, who rescued Paine from prison, and he was an honored guest and intimate friend in Monroe's house for a year and

a half. This was at the very height of the "irreligion" of the French Revolution (1793-4), yet, as history records, Monroe went so far in his cordiality to the Deistic and Atheistic leaders of the Revolution that he was represented as compromising America and was recalled. Roosevelt and others have complained bitterly of the influence of Paine on him.

I am not aware that anybody has ever claimed to have found evidence that Monroe was a Christian believer, but there is a passage about him in the Owen-Bachelor debate which really establishes that he was not.

Monroe died on July 4th, 1831, and within a few months the story was current in clerical circles in New York that he had refused to have a clergyman at his bedside. The Rev. Dr. Wilson repeated this to Owen, and he said that his New York clerical informant added on his own account that he "had always thought Monroe an easy sort of infidel." A Dr. Matthews was named as the clergyman who offered to pray with Monroe and was refused; and a well known divine asserted that he was told this by Matthews. At once when the story was published, there was a quarrel between the reverend gentlemen such as we have seen before. Dr. Matthews said that the story was false, and that he had never told it.

Whether or no there was a confusion of names, or which of the reverend gentlemen lied—all this took place, remember, within a few months of Monroe's death—I will not inquire. But the Rev. Mr. Bachelor went to

Monroe's son-in-law, Mr. S. L. Gouverneur, who denied that any clergyman had offered his services and been refused. He went on to say that "his father-in-law had the highest respect for Christianity, considering it to be of immense benefit to society, and that he [who?] gave no reason for supposing that he was skeptical" (p. 235). This is the language of Bachelor, not Gouverneur, and Bachelor was not the most scrupulous of men; but, even as it stands, it gives away Monroe. It is simply the kind of language about Christianity which a benevolent or diplomatic Deist or Agnostic would employ. The simplest thing for Gouverneur to do was to say that his father was a Christian believer. He took care to say nothing of the kind. Even the clergy knew better. Monroe, who died without a clergyman, was, like his friend Paine, an Infidel Father.

After Monroe came John Quincy Adams. It was the Era of Good Feeling—in more senses than one. The unpleasant word "Infidel" was almost dropped. Men who, like Adams (a Unitarian), rejected the Trinity, the Atonement, the divinity of Christ, the Holy Ghost, all sacraments, etc., etc., were now accorded the title of "Christians." The Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopalian of today must realize that, as no one disputes, even the sixth President of the United States was a "Christian" only in that sense. He denied the divinity of Christ. As to the long line of his successors, I leave it to some American historian to discover, if he can, how many of them believed, or what they be-

lieved. The thing which great men hide most successfully is the thing which common folk regard as the inspiration of their lives. We will pass at once to the next figure in the Presidential procession.

CHAPTER VI

PRESIDENT GRANT

President Ulysses Simpson Grant, eighteenth of his line, was another skeptic who took so little trouble to conceal his disdain of the Christian religion that there is no controversy about his position. His principal biographer, Hamlin Garland, does not hesitate to say outright that Grant "subscribed to no creed" (*U. S. Grant: His Life and Character*, 1898, p. 522). The Rev. M. J. Cramer, who claimed some personal acquaintance with him, admits (*U. S. Grant*, 1898, p. 28) that he vainly tried to get from the President some explicit avowal of faith and weakly concludes that he "believed the *fundamental* doctrines of the Christian religion." To a statesman the "fundamental" doctrines are the ethical teachings, and in a later chapter ("His Views on Religion") Dr. Cramer admits this. Grant, he shows, was merely a Theist, like Paine and Franklin. In proof of his piety we are told that the President "often prayed to God mentally, but briefly"; which is another way of saying that he never even joined in prayers.

So notorious was Grant's skepticism that the orthodox put into circulation the usual slanders of his character. Cramer, counting him religious, disposes of these slanders for us. He gives (p. 203) a letter from General Halleck on the charges of swearing and drunkenness, and

this gives the same testimony to his skepticism. Grant, Halleck says, was remarkably sober for "a man who is not a religious man." Another Christian biographer, E. D. Mansfield, makes no attempt to rebut the charge of skepticism. All that the orthodox can claim is that he was baptized on his deathbed; and, not only is this palpable proof that he was *not* a Christian all his life, but, as no biographer contests, Grant was baptized while he was *unconscious*, and, when he rallied and learned the fact, he expressed his surprise that they should do such a thing.

CHAPTER VII

THE RELIGION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I doubt if there is any man whose religious beliefs have been discussed more frequently, more heatedly, than those of Abraham Lincoln. Often during the writing of this little book I have pleasantly imagined my seven ex-Presidents sitting under the shade of some palm in the Elysian Fields—perhaps Napoleon, Palmerston, and Disraeli join the group—and enjoying this feverish attempt of mortals to get at their "real religious opinions." I imagine the ghostly elbow of Jefferson tickling the ghostly ribs of Abe Lincoln as he. . . . But the limit of my space approaches. Let us plunge at once into the business.

And after going once more over the entire literature of the subject, right up to date—I have consulted more than a hundred books in the British National Library in compiling this little work—I say deliberately that there is no doubt about the heresy of the religious beliefs of Lincoln. There is no serious difference of opinion about them. He was a Deist. The question is, remember, not whether Lincoln was a follower or admirer of the *ethic* of Christ, but if he believed in the Trinity, divinity of Christ, atonement, revelation, and so on. The question is, further, not whether he was an Agnostic or Atheist, which no one affirms,

but whether he was a Deist, a believer in God but disbeliever in Christian doctrines. Nine-tenths of the controversy is due to a failure to recognize this.

Take, for instance, one of the latest and best biographies of Lincoln, W. M. Stephenson's *Lincoln* (1924). The author makes a very careful study of Lincoln's religion and affects to find the truth between the two contending factions. He does not. He may be astonished to know that what he says about Lincoln is just what every responsible Rationalist claims. For he has made one little mistake. He says that Lincoln's friend Herndon was an Agnostic and claimed Lincoln for the same "noble army of doubters." How so industrious a writer could make such a mistake I cannot imagine. Herndon expressly says that Lincoln believed firmly in God and immortality, and that he himself believed *more* than Lincoln; for, he says, he believed in a personal God and Lincoln (at that time) in an impersonal God (p. 156). Ingersoll merely said the same about Lincoln. Therefore Mr. Stephenson's final conclusion—that Lincoln believed in God, Prayer, and Immortality and nothing more—which is supposed to be the last word on Lincoln's religion, is the same as that of Herndon and Ingersoll. In more mystic language Mr. Stephenson says:

> Though he held tenaciously to all that was mystical in her [his mother's] bequest to him, he rejected early its formulations. The evidence of later years reaffirms that double fact. The sense of a spiritual world behind and beyond the world of phenomena grew on him with the years; the power to explain, to formulate, that world, was

denied him. He had no bent for dogma. Ethically, mystically, he was always a Christian; dogmatically, he knew not what he was. Therefore to the challenge to prove himself a Christian on purely dogmatic grounds [in 1846] he had no reply.

The danger of taking "mystic" views is that one is apt to get misty. The whole serious question about Lincoln is, not whether he ever formulated his philosophy, but whether he rejected *the formulations of the Churches*. Moreover, in 1846 Lincoln was *not* "challenged to prove himself a Christian." He was simply asked to say whether he was a Christian; and, being an honest man, he refused. We all admit that he was "religious" and believed sincerely in God; and Mr. Stephenson agrees with us that he had "parted company from his mother's world" (Church doctrines) and was only ethically a Christian.

The same confusion runs through the whole of the literature which sets out to prove, professedly against Rationalists, that Lincoln was in some sense or other "a Christian." It is very plain in Dr. J. F. Rusling's *Abraham Lincoln and His Religious Faith* (1915). He starts out with the statement that some people (unnamed) accuse Lincoln of Agnosticism, and he proves that he was a Theist! He admits that he was "not a member of any of our orthodox churches," but says that he was "*substantially* a Christian"; which always means that a man isn't.

Judge McBride in his recent *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (1926) says noth-

ing about religion. General C. H. T. Collis (*The Religion of Abraham Lincoln*, 1893) is a soldier on the Christian side. Ingersoll had challenged him to prove that Lincoln believed in the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, and the Atonement; and Ingersoll's precise language leaves no excuse to the people who say that Rationalists claim that Lincoln did not believe in God.

However, Collis set out boldly to prove that Lincoln was a Christian in that sense. Of his three proofs the first is the usual evidence that Lincoln attended church (coupled with the admission that he was not "technically" a member of any Church), and the third is evidence that he believed in and prayed to God. One hopes that generals presiding over courts-martial have a better idea of the relevance of evidence. But the third and greatest proof is the worst. It consists of references to the Bible and the "Saviour of the World" which Lincoln is said (by Collis) to have addressed to a pious deputation of colored men. Ingersoll let off his military friend too lightly on that proof. *No authority whatever is given by Collis*, and we seem to have here merely some pious colored man's impression or elaboration of what Lincoln said.

It is more interesting to turn from this to what is understood to be the most substantial book on the orthodox side, H. B. Rankin's *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (1916). When he comes to treat of Lincoln's religion, (ch. xiv), it appears that he has no personal recollections at all. He relies entirely

on the evidence of others, and his idea of evidence is naive.

First he devotes no less than twenty pages to telling us that Cartwright, Lincoln's political opponent in 1846, the preacher who tried to defeat him by raising the cry of infidelity, changed his mind in later years. In 1862, sixteen years later, he told Rankin that he had been misinformed. He now knew that Lincoln (who had become President in the meantime) was a Christian because he went to Church! We have a score of pages to establish this, which no one ever disputed, and ten further pages about the burning of some paper in 1833 which Herndon claims to have been an anti-Christian essay by Lincoln. The point is immaterial, as we shall see presently, in Lincoln's own words, quoted by Rankin, that in 1833 he *was* skeptical. But we have a fine instance of the scrupulousness of these apologists when we find Rankin settling the whole question of this burned manuscript by a story told him by his mother, who got it from another woman who got it from a man, fifty-six years after the event!

Next Mr. Rankin quotes the testimony of six men who had known Lincoln in those early days, the thirties, at New Salem. Listen to them:

1. Irwin says, nearly thirty years after the events, that Lincoln was certainly a Christian, but "although I was personally acquainted with him for twenty-five years, and often in his office, *I never heard him say a word on Christianity* and religious belief." Clearly a valu-

able witness. One thing he does know, however, is that once in the course of a debate young Lincoln said that, if you take the gospels literally, Jesus was "a bastard"; but he feels sure that Lincoln was talking in a Pickwickian sense. On the whole, a strong witness for the prosecution.

2. Menter Graham explains the essay written by young Lincoln in 1833. It was shown to him by Lincoln, and it was pro-Christian not anti-Christian. As an instance of its Christian contents he states that it rejected the doctrine of hell!

3. T. Mostiller, who was present when Lincoln was charged with infidelity, is ready to take an oath on the gospels that Abraham "unqualifiedly denied" the charge and said that he was a Christian. As Rankin has already admitted that Lincoln did nothing of the sort, and it is a notorious historical fact that he did not, he ought to have been ashamed to insert this garrulous old chap's muddle-headed reminiscences thirty years after the event.

4. I. Codgal actually spoke to Lincoln about his heresies in 1859—he tells this in 1874—and Lincoln admitted that he did not believe in hell. But, as he did not tell Codgal what else he disbelieved, he, of course, believed all other Christian dogmas!

5. Something like a centenarian—Rankin says that he "is here" in 1915—remembers that in 1858 Lincoln made to him a complete and most glowing confession of belief in every Christian doctrine. And it is on the strength

of senile piffle of this sort, flatly contradicted by every other witness, that some writers talk about the "canting speculations" of Rationalists.

6. E. Mansford remembers that Lincoln "nodded his head" when he, Mansford, unfolded to him arguments for Christianity . . . Be not impatient, reader. The procession of village idiots is now over.

Lastly Mr. Rankin, who has wasted about fifty pages on this stuff, comes to his knockout argument, one right on the point for Ingersoll and every other skeptic. His mother, Mrs. Rankin, told him in 1889 the real truth about Lincoln at New Salem and Springfield. She had a private conversation with Lincoln in 1846. She remembers it so well that she is able in 1889 to repeat four pages of it, in Abe's own grand language, to her son. And this—I string together the essential phrases—is the gist of it. He admits that in 1833 he had grave doubts, though in 1846 he has "a stronger and higher grasp of thought." And he goes on:

> I do not claim that all my doubts were removed then or since that time have been swept away. They are not. Probably it is to be my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning my way through life, as questioning doubting Thomas did. . . . I doubt the possibility or propriety of settling the religion of Jesus Christ in the models of man-made creeds and dogmas. . . . The fundamental truths reported in the four gospels . . . . are settled and fixed moral precepts with me. I have concluded to dismiss from my mind the debatable wrangles that once perplexed me. . . . sweeping them all out of my mind among the nonessentials. I cannot without mental reservations assent to long and complicated creeds and cate-

chisms. If the Church would simply ask for assent to the Saviour's statement, of the substance of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc., that Church would I gladly unite with.

And the dear old lady—I mean Rankin, not his mother—does not see that this is a decisive proof of my thesis! Lincoln was an *ethical* follower of Christ only, as Jefferson was. He could, he says, subscribe to no creeds: he could belong to no existing church. And it is constantly plain that the one discordant word, "Saviour," is the pious lady's interpretation of the Lincoln of forty years before. Lincoln flatly denied the Atonement.

Now, reader, look back over this complete summary of the evidence that Lincoln was a Christian. It contains only two things which, if we accepted them, would imply that he was more than a Deist. One, contradicted by every other scrap of evidence, is the impression of an aged man in 1915 of what Lincoln said to him in 1858. The other (in Collis) is a phrase for which no authority whatever is given.

And against this you have not only the weighty presumption that arises from this entire lack of evidence of orthodoxy—going to church is notoriously not evidence, especially in a man who believed in God—not only the formal testimony of Mrs. Rankin, but the emphatic testimony of reputable and trained men who were intimate with Lincoln like Colonel W. H. Lamon ("He was not a Christian," *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*, 1911 ed., p. 335) and Lincoln's partner and close friend, W. H. Herndon (*Abraham Lincoln*, 1892, ed.).

Herndon, carefully weighing his words in view of the odium he had excited, tells how, as no one disputes, Lincoln read Paine and Volney in his youth, and became a Deist. For further proof of this, though Herndon ought to be witness enough, he quotes three or four men who knew Lincoln well in the early days and specifically testify that he denied the divinity of Christ. I am not accepting Herndon's witnesses and rejecting Rankin's, for the latter's witnesses do not (except for the doddering old fool in 1915) testify that he did believe in the divinity of Christ. From his early skepticism Lincoln never receded. His belief in God may have become livelier. His belief in Christian doctrines never returned. So says Mrs. Rankin as well as Herndon. In fact—and here is evidence that should settle the whole business for any man with a grain of common sense—so said Mrs. Lincoln herself in 1866. Herndon gives her words:

> Mr. Lincoln had no faith and no hope in the usual acceptation of those words. He never joined a Church; but still, as I believe, he was a religious man by nature. He first seemed to think about the subject when our boy Willie died, and then more than ever about the time he went to Gettysburg; but it was a kind of poetry in his nature, and he was never a technical Christian.

So say, from their personal knowledge, the two other chief witnesses, Herndon and Mrs. Rankin. And nothing else in the evidence is inconsistent with this except the impression of a toothless centenarian of some talk of sixty years earlier and the highly colored impression of a colored gentleman who once saw Lincoln.

Well, that is all that the Rationalist claims. These six makers of the United States had the same religion as Thomas Paine. Was he an infidel? Then they were. That is the point: not whether they attended church (and carefully avoided communion) but whether they believed in anything more than God and immortality. Some of them, I have shown, were skeptical about the nature of God and heterodox about immortality. Paine never was. Rousseau and Robespierre never were. Deists pray to God and, as a rule, put Jesus above all other men. Were Voltaire, Shaftesbury, Paine, Rousseau, and Gibbon infidels? Then the six greatest Presidents of the United States, the men who did most to create its idealism, were its six Infidel Fathers.